

Status Report

More Damage, Injury Claims In Smaller Cars

A Highway Loss Data Institute study has found that the shorter the wheelbase of a car, the more likely that when it is in a crash that results in a collision coverage claim for damage to the vehicle, the crash will also result in a claim for occupant injuries.

The HLDI study also found that "as the sizes of the collision coverage claims increase, the percentage of associated injury claims increases dramatically."

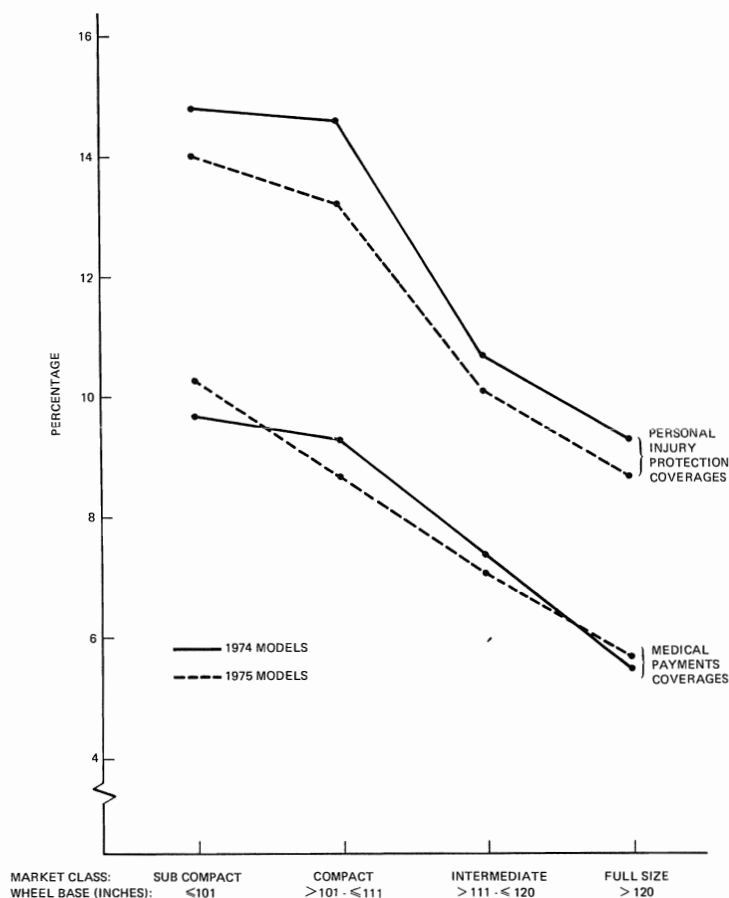
The HLDI report analyzed collision, medical payments, and personal injury protection coverage claims for 1974 and 1975 model passenger cars. The study examined the percentage of collision coverage claims that were associated with claims under medical payments coverages and under personal injury protection ("no-fault") coverages. (Both types of coverage provide medical expenses reimbursement to injured occupants of the insured car.) The results were standardized to minimize differences attributable to operator age group and the amount of the collision coverage deductible.

A "pronounced inverse relationship" between the size of vehicles and the percentages of collision coverage claims from crashes that also resulted in injury claims was found across the four major market classes — sub compact, compact, intermediate and full size. (See figure.)

INJURY CLAIMS, CLAIM SIZE

For the 1974 models studied, "7.9 percent of all of the collision coverage claims had associated injury claims" under medical payments coverages, the report found. For comparatively small collision coverage claims of \$200 or less, only 1.1

PERCENTAGE OF COLLISION COVERAGE CLAIMS WITH ASSOCIATED INJURY COVERAGE CLAIMS BY MARKET CLASS* — 1974 AND 1975 MODELS



*RESULTS ARE STANDARDIZED BY DEDUCTIBLE AMOUNT AND OPERATOR AGE GROUP.

HLDI, 1977

percent had associated injury claims, while for larger collision coverage claims of more than \$600, 20.9 percent had associated injury claims. "The results for all market classes in both model years show dramatic increases in the percentages of associated injury claims as the collision coverage claim sizes increase," the report said. (See table below.)

MARKET CLASS RESULTS

When the four major market classes were compared within each group of collision claim sizes, the full size models "in general had the lowest percentage of associated injury claims and the sub compacts the highest."

Among the market classes, large variations were found in loss experience under collision coverage. For example, "33 percent of the collision coverage claims for 1974 sub compact vehicles were above \$600, whereas only 27 percent of the collision coverage claims for the 1974 full size vehicles were above \$600," the report said. In order to find out what effect these differences had, the study also computed the percentage of associated injury claims that would have occurred if loss experience under collision coverage were the same for all vehicle types.

**PERCENTAGE OF COLLISION COVERAGE CLAIMS
WITH ASSOCIATED MEDICAL PAYMENTS COVERAGE INJURY CLAIMS
BY MARKET CLASS AND COLLISION COVERAGE CLAIM SIZE¹
1974 AND 1975 MODELS**

Market Class	COLLISION COVERAGE CLAIM SIZE					
	Less Than Or Equal To \$200		\$201 - \$600		Greater Than \$600	
	1974 Models	1975 Models	1974 Models	1975 Models	1974 Models	1975 Models
Sub Compact ²	1.3	1.4	4.5	4.0	23.9	25.1
Compact ³	1.5	0.9	4.5	3.9	23.7	22.6
Intermediate ⁴	1.1	0.8	3.6	2.6	20.4	20.6
Full Size ⁵	0.8	0.8	2.6	2.3	16.5	16.7
Luxury ⁶	0.6	0.5	1.2	2.1	11.5	15.6
Specialty ⁶	0.9	1.1	2.9	2.7	19.5	20.2
Expensive Specialty ⁶	0.7	0.9	2.3	2.5	15.5	17.0
All	1.1	0.9	3.6	3.0	20.9	20.7

¹ Results are standardized by deductible amount and operator age group.

² Wheelbase less than or equal to 101 inches.

³ Wheelbase greater than 101 inches and less than or equal to 111 inches.

⁴ Wheelbase greater than 111 inches and less than or equal to 120 inches.

⁵ Wheelbase greater than 120 inches.

⁶ Market class assignments not made on basis of wheelbase.

Note: The Sports market class which had insufficient claims to compute meaningful percentages is omitted.

The findings showed that “even when the effects of the large differences in collision coverage loss experience among the vehicle types were eliminated, there still existed a strong[inverse] relationship with the size of the vehicle and the percentage of collision coverage claims with associated injury claims.”

The results for personal injury protection coverages, “although based on much smaller numbers of claims than the corresponding results for the medical payments coverages, exhibit similar trends and relationships. Among the four major market classes, the full size models generally had the lowest percentages of associated injury claims within each collision coverage claim size group and the sub compacts and compacts had the highest.”

RISK OF INJURY

The increased risk of injury to vehicle occupants in a crash as the size of the vehicle decreases “has been repeatedly documented from a variety of data sources, including insurance data,” the report stressed. The results of this study provide additional evidence of the substantially increased risk of injury as the

Adams Plans April Passive Restraint Hearings

Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams will reopen the issue of passive restraints with hearings sometime in April.

A definite date for the hearings has not been set, but Adams' office has confirmed that they will be held. The first report of the hearings was in an exclusive story by Mary Jane Fisher in the *National Underwriter*.

Adams has expressed concern over the decision of his predecessor, William Coleman, Jr., to have a “demonstration program” of passive restraints rather than require passive restraints in all new autos. Coleman reached his decision despite his findings that passive restraints were technologically feasible, economical and could save approximately 12,000 lives per year and prevent over 100,000 injuries. At his Senate confirmation hearings and elsewhere, Adams expressed puzzlement at how Coleman could reach such a finding and still not require the livesaving devices. Adams told the Senate that he would review the Coleman decision. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Feb. 18, 1976.)

HOUSE SUPPORT

On March 1, Rep. John Moss (D-Calif.), chairman of the oversight and investigations subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee, wrote to Adams saying that the subcommittee has found that “while the program of federal motor vehicle safety standards has contributed substantially to reducing the toll of highway fatalities and injuries, it has in recent years slowed to a virtual halt.

“A further substantial breakthrough in reducing the toll of highway deaths and injuries . . . can be achieved in the near future only through the issuance . . . of a mandatory passive restraint standard.”

Moss went on to say that Coleman's demonstration program “contains grave flaws and is not in keeping with the mandate of the Congress.” Moss said that the subcommittee firmly supports Adams' decision to reconsider the passive restraint question.

vehicle size decreases, it said. Moreover, "previous HLDI reports have repeatedly shown that the smallest vehicles (sub compacts) have higher collision coverage claim frequencies and claim sizes than the largest vehicle size (full size), it said. Thus, the report concluded that in addition to the increased risk for occupants of a smaller car when a crash does occur, "there is a greater likelihood of being exposed to that risk" as indicated by more frequent claims and larger claim amounts for smaller vehicles.

Single copies of *Automobile Insurance Losses: Percentage of Collision Coverage Claims with Associated Injury Claims for 1974 and 1975 Models* (HLDI I 75-2) can be obtained by writing to the Highway Loss Data Institute, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037.

Sometimes Counterproductive

Researcher Charges Alcohol Programs Ineffective

Citing the failure of community programs to reduce alcohol-related crashes, a behavioral scientist has recommended that "no large-scale community alcohol program be undertaken until methods of quantitatively measured efficacy are developed. Because of the possibility of adverse effects and the depletion of resources expended on ineffective programs, rigorous evaluation of programs on a small scale should be accomplished before they are adopted on a large scale."

Leon Robertson, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's senior behavioral scientist, said, "Advocates of behavioral screening and behavioral change programs should have the same obligation to establish scientifically their safety and efficacy as inventors of drugs or any other therapy or preventive strategy have before their widespread use is allowed."

Robertson delivered his remarks to an international meeting on "Alcohol, Drugs, and Traffic Safety" held recently in Australia.

He contrasted the failure of current alcohol programs to the success of vehicle and highway improvements which by reducing the magnitudes of crash forces have proved their effectiveness in fatality and injury reduction. "No alcohol countermeasure program has been found to reduce fatalities for a sustained period of time," Robertson said.

As an example, he cited the 1967 British law which provided for prearrest testing for alcohol and substantial penalties for drivers convicted of alcohol impaired driving or refusing to submit to the alcohol test. Although there was an initial decrease in deaths, it "did not take the drinking population long to discover the widely publicized claims of greatly increased chances of arrest and conviction were not realized in fact," Robertson said.

U.S. PROGRAMS

In the United States, Robertson used as an example the federally-sponsored "Alcohol Safety Action Programs" (ASAP) in various communities throughout the country. "Evaluation of the overall impact of ASAP has found no evidence to conclude that there was an effect on overall fatalities," he said.

Robertson cited in particular one New York ASAP program which was found to be worse than ineffective. In that program, intoxicated or impaired drivers were assigned randomly to an education-rehabilitation program or to the usual court procedures. "Subsequent driving records indicated no difference in subsequent convictions for alcohol related driving but significantly higher crash involvement of those in the education-rehabilitation program," he said.

Robertson also discussed a federally sponsored advertising campaign aimed at drunk driving. He said that despite strong urgings from the research community, no well designed evaluation of the advertising was done prior to the program. "The means for evaluating advertising campaigns in real world controlled experiments are available," Robertson said, "and failure to demonstrate the efficacy of such campaigns before launching them on a large scale is inexcusable."

"The prospects for deterrence through law enforcement are no better," Robertson charged. "Current research in criminology suggests that arrests for most crimes must exceed 30 percent of violations before the violation rate begins to be affected by the arrest rate. Yet in the U.S. the chances of arrest for driving with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.10 or above is about 1 in 2,000 on average and only 3-4 times that in ASAP and other special enforcement areas," he said.

Robertson concluded that the "history of public health clearly indicates that intervention in individual behavioral processes is usually the least effective strategy in reducing human damage. Since we can demonstrate quantitatively that increasing crashworthiness standards for vehicles and the creation of nonlethal roadside environments can reduce the severity of injuries substantially, first priority should be given to these measures. Not only the losses related to alcohol use but other losses would be reduced as well."

Copies of the paper, "Evaluation of Community Programs," can be obtained by writing to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037.

Drivers 'Favor' 55 MPH, But Don't Drive It

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently announced the results of nine surveys which indicate that "a continuation of the 55 mile per hour maximum national speed limit is favored by a majority of American motorists." At the same time, the General Accounting Office reported that, after a 5 m.p.h. drop in average speeds on primary roads between 1973 and 1974 (to about 55 m.p.h.) and a 7 m.p.h. drop on the interstate in the same period (to an average 58 m.p.h.), average speeds have been increasing since 1974. The report said that in 1975, "on rural interstate highways, 14 states observed that at least 75 percent of all vehicles exceeded the 55 m.p.h. speed limit. In 15 states, 10 percent or more of the vehicles on rural interstates were traveling over 65 m.p.h."

According to NHTSA, "support for the national speed limit was widespread among all age groups, sexes, income levels and geographic locations represented in the surveys" it analyzed. The agency cited "fear of arrest" and "public belief that slower speeds save energy and lives" as the reasons survey respondents gave for their observance of the 55 m.p.h. limit.

The GAO report says, however, that although "increased enforcement nationwide has resulted in more speeding citations issued, [it] has not produced overall speed reductions since 1974." State enforcement agencies believe that "too many drivers exceed the speed limit for them to enforce it effectively." GAO's findings led that agency to conclude that "the nation's motorists do not think that the fuel savings or the safety benefits of driving slower are worth the inconveniences."

The GAO report explored a number of problems with the current national program for reducing speeds. According to GAO:

- While the law requires the Transportation Secretary to withhold federal-aid highway funds from states which do not enact a 55 m.p.h. limit and which do not certify that the state is enforcing the limit, neither Congress nor the Department of Transportation has provided guidelines as to what constitutes

adequate “enforcement.” Without such guidelines, both the states and DOT believe it would be difficult if not impossible to impose the sanction on any state.

- Any attempt by the federal government to define “enforcement” would be viewed by many states as an intrusion into the states’ historic role in traffic enforcement.

- Many state and federal officials view the withholding of federal highway construction funds as an inappropriate and unusable penalty for non-compliance in this area: it primarily affects the highway departments, which do not have traffic law enforcement responsibilities; its heavy economic impact would make it politically dangerous; and it could have a negative effect on overall highway safety and fuel conservation efforts.

The study concluded that DOT should seek ways to promote “a strong spirit of cooperation” between the states and DOT by providing workable guidelines for what constitutes “enforcement” and by exploring alternatives to the present sanction. DOT should also develop a “positive public information program” to encourage voluntary driver compliance with the speed limit. Given the failure of DOT’s current ad campaign, however, GAO said perhaps “nothing short of rigid traffic enforcement will significantly affect further reductions of vehicle speeds.”

Neither report discussed the possibility of lowering the top speed capability of vehicles, a proposal which first came under consideration at NHTSA in 1967. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 10, No. 8, April 11, 1975.)

Copies of the GAO report, *Speed Limit 55: Is It Achievable?* are available by writing: U.S. General Accounting Office, Distribution Section, Room 4522, 441 G St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20548.

Opel Fuel Systems Found Defective

After more than three years of investigation, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has determined that “many” Opel Kadetts manufactured abroad by General Motors have defective fuel systems “which could cause fires.”

NHTSA said that “1968-1970 Kadetts have a taillight mounting bolt that can penetrate the fuel tank in right rear-end impacts at closing speeds below 10 miles per hour.” According to the agency, “This problem has been corrected on the 1971 and subsequent models by the installation of protective plastic caps on the tail lamp bolts.”

The agency said its “investigation also disclosed that fuel line separation occurs on the 1964 through 1970 Kadetts at almost twice the rate of comparable type vehicles. The manufacturer has since installed special clamps on the fuel line connections of all later model Kadetts.”

NHTSA estimates there are still in use some 315,000 of the 1964-1970 Opels, which have one or both fuel system defects.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found in a series of 1973 crash tests that fuel systems for Opel 1900’s had serious fuel system deficiencies. In those tests, a 1973 Opel 1900 was struck from the rear at 36.4 miles per hour by a 1973 Chevrolet Impala.

The Institute found that the Opel’s tank, held in place by only one metal strap, was torn from the car and hurled to the ground, where it lost fuel at a rate of nearly a quart per minute. The inadequacies of

its design allowed the Opel tank and its attachments to fail in a number of ways, any one of them a potential fire hazard: A severed fuel gauge line, severed fuel return and vent lines, severed fuel filler, a broken tank strap and its bracket, and a hole in the tank itself, punched there by the Opel's own rear suspension mounting brackets. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 8, No. 11, May 29, 1973.)

An NHTSA spokesman told *Status Report* that the Opel Kadett investigation was limited to static and low speed tests.

PUBLIC MEETING

General Motors has been notified of the defects but has not yet ordered a recall. The auto maker is expected to testify at a public meeting on the defect scheduled by NHTSA for 10 a.m., March 30 in Room 5332 of the Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. Interested parties are invited to testify at this meeting or submit written comments to NHTSA's Office of Defect Investigations, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Hearing On Moped Regulations Scheduled

A hearing which could lead to greater uniformity of vehicle standards for mopeds has been called by the Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission (VESC) – a Congressionally chartered compact of 43 states and the District of Columbia.

Mopeds typically weigh 60-100 pounds, have a small engine and are generally started by pedaling. Currently some states consider mopeds to be bicycles, while most consider them motorcycles. Certain states place a maximum speed capability or horsepower limitation on mopeds while others have no such requirement.

The federal government considers mopeds to be "motor driven cycles," a subcategory of motorcycles. In September 1974, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration amended its motorcycle standards for lights, brakes, and controls in order to ease compliance for moped manufacturers. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 10, No. 19, Nov. 24, 1975.)

Several of the proposed VESC regulations are the same as federal standards for motorcycles. In addition, the commission's proposed regulations cover such areas as wheels, steering systems, seats, chain guards, horns and maximum vehicle size not covered by federal standards.

Likewise, standards for bicycles, established by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, are also more comprehensive than federal motorcycle standards. CPSC requires strength tests for bicycle parts; road test requirements, including braking and handling; equipment specifications including limitations on protrusions and sharp edges. Bicycle instruction manuals are required to include information on operation and safety as well as assembly and maintenance. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Feb. 18, 1976.)

MODEL FOR STATES

VESC has scheduled the hearing to receive comments on its proposed regulations. If adopted by VESC, the regulations would, after certain administrative procedures, become law in several states and would probably serve as a model for legislation in other states.

(Cont'd on page 8)

The hearing will be held on May 11 at the Maryland Department of Transportation Presentation Room, Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

Copies of the proposed regulations and details on the hearing can be obtained by writing to Dairl Bragg, Executive Director, Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission, 1030 15th St., N.W., Suite 908, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Public Meeting Set On Air Brake Standard

The Department of Transportation's advisory subcommittees on truck and bus safety have scheduled a public meeting for March 17 and 18 on the federal air brake standard (FMVSS 121).

The truck and bus safety subcommittees of the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee and the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council were created last year by then-Secretary of Transportation William Coleman at the request of trucking industry officials. Creation of a separate advisory group on trucks and buses had been opposed by the Teamsters Union which labeled the industry effort as "another attempt to scrap the FMVSS 121 Brake Standard." (See *Status Report*, Vol. 11, No. 9, June 7, 1976.)

The public meeting on FMVSS 121 will be held on March 17 from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. and on March 18 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon in room 2230 at 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. Persons wishing to make a presentation, which will be limited to 20 minutes, should contact William H. Marsh, NHTSA Executive Secretary at (202) 426-2872.

NHTSA Official Presents Helmet Arguments

The statement excerpted below was recently delivered by Lewis Buchanan, motorcycle safety specialist for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, before Wisconsin's Senate Commerce Committee which was considering repeal of that state's motorcycle helmet use law.

Evidence documented in this country, several European countries, New Zealand and Australia shows conclusively that motorcycle safety helmets are effective in reducing the likelihood and severity of head injuries in motorcycle crashes

It has been suggested that the National Motorcycle Safety Standard is being forced upon motorcyclists by certain bureaucrats who would not know a motorcycle if they fell over it . . . or off it. I assure you that this notion is not the case, and that motorcycle enthusiasts are well represented on the administration's staff we in NHTSA have a first-hand knowledge of the problems that are faced by our fellow motorcyclists. It is the policy of the administration that our mutual efforts be focused on reducing some of the unnecessary risks in motorcycling without placing unwarranted restrictions upon the motorcycling sport or industry.

It is suggested by some observers that state laws requiring the use of safety helmets by motorcyclists may be unconstitutional. This question has been brought before the highest courts in at least 25 states. In all but one of these cases, the high state courts have upheld the constitutionality of safety helmet laws. The single dissenting decision was

rendered by the Illinois Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of helmet laws in all such cases it has reviewed

The use of safety helmets is challenged by some people who allege that helmets impair vision or hearing. Let us consider the assertion that helmets are a hazard because they impair hearing. Whether or not a given sound will be heard by a cyclist is dependent upon three factors: (1) the auditory capability of the cyclist, (2) the intensity and frequency of the sound of interest, and (3) the intensity and frequency of environmental noise that might "mask" or hide the desired sound. A given sound will be heard by a cyclist if it is loud enough when it reaches his ear to be above his hearing threshold, and if it is not "masked" or hidden by other sounds or noise present at the same time. Motorcycles create high levels of noise. For a rider to hear any other sound in the presence of this high noise level, the sound must be as loud or louder than that emitted by the motorcycle itself. Helmets reduce the loudness of both the sound of interest and the motorcycle noise by an equal amount, and therefore, do not alter the signal-to-noise ratio between the two sounds. Consequently, as long as the rider can hear the motorcycle itself while wearing a helmet, he or she can also hear any other sound with a favorable signal-to-noise ratio at least as well as a driver who does not wear a helmet

A study of whether helmets impair vision conducted by NHTSA found that the typical full coverage helmet, representing almost 95 percent of current helmet sales, restricts a rider's field of view in the horizontal plane (peripheral vision) by less than 3 percent from what the person would see without a helmet. All helmets provided a horizontal field of view of more than 180°, well above the 140° used by state driver licensing agencies for screening out drivers with possible vision problems that would warrant some type of restricted driving privilege. Add to this the fact that a skilled cyclist continually scans the environment, turning the head from side to side. This technique, coupled with the field of view provided by currently available helmets assures that peripheral vision is not impaired by wearing a helmet

The neck injury question has been used in opposition to helmet laws as an attempt to exploit an issue on which there is not a great deal of valid data. Consequently, the problem has been magnified far out of proportion. Motorcyclists have been wearing safety helmets for more than 30 years, and during this period a number of studies of injury patterns in motorcycle accidents have been made. Very few provide any support for the claim that helmets increase fatal or non-fatal neck injuries. Studies done recently in Nebraska, California, Canada, and Japan show that the incidence of neck injury of any type occurs in less than 2 percent of all motorcycle crashes. In other words, the incidence of neck injury in accidents is very low compared to that of head injury. An on-going multidisciplinary accident investigation study at the University of Southern California has found only two cases of neck injury in 471 cases it has investigated.

Motorcycle safety helmets are effective in preventing many needless deaths and serious injuries. In cooperation with the states of Michigan and Illinois, a study was made of more than 5,600 motorcycle accidents occurring in the early 1970's. In the study, special emphasis was given to the effectiveness of safety helmets. The major conclusions of the study published in May 1974 were:

In the state of Illinois, which does not have mandatory helmet usage, motorcycle accidents resulted in three times more fatal or serious head injury, twice as much head

injury of lesser severity and, overall, two and a half times more head injury in general, compared to similar accidents in the state of Michigan which does have a helmet law.

Compared to similar accidents in Illinois, compliance with the helmet law in Michigan resulted in the following reductions in overall head injury: 65 percent in urban areas of the state, 51 percent in rural areas, 66 percent for motorcycle passengers, and 56 percent for operators.

Most motorcyclists are fully aware of the lifesaving value of safety helmets. I am often told by those who oppose helmet laws that "they never ride without a helmet, but they don't want to be told by the state that they must wear a helmet." However, the Michigan/Illinois motorcycle accident study revealed that less than 30 percent of the riders wear a helmet when it is not required by law. This view is supported by a California Highway Patrol study conducted during 1968 which reported that only about 28 percent of the motorcyclists involved in crashes were wearing helmets on a voluntary basis. A January 1975 study in Nebraska found that helmets were used in only 28 percent of the fatal crashes and 30 percent of the non-fatal crashes.

A survey of helmet usage conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety during 1975 found that in two helmet law states, Georgia and Maryland, helmets were used by more than 98 percent of the 1,000 motorcyclists observed. In two non-helmet law states, helmets were used by 62 percent of the 1,338 motorcyclists observed in California and by 25 percent of the 504 motorcyclists observed in Illinois. This data suggests that a state repealing or weakening its helmet law must anticipate a substantial reduction in helmet usage.

Those who oppose laws requiring the use of helmets by motorcyclists here in Wisconsin and in other parts of our nation, are generally well organized and extremely vocal, but do they reflect the views of most motorcyclists? During 1967, 400 motorcyclists and 400 automobile drivers were asked this question by the Wisconsin Bureau of Highway Safety Promotion, "Do you favor mandatory use of a helmet?" Sixty-two percent of the motorcyclists and 98 percent of the automobile drivers favored compulsory use of safety helmets by motorcyclists.

All persons involved in motorcycle accidents in the state of Idaho during 1974 were surveyed regarding their view of helmet effectiveness. Of those who replied, 85 percent indicated that their helmets had reduced injury and 9 percent voluntarily added that it saved their lives. The Idaho survey also found that 77 percent of the riders responding were in favor of the law. The study reported that there were seven motorcyclists strongly in support of the mandatory helmet law for every one strongly opposed to it.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1976 withdrew authority from the Department of Transportation to financially sanction a state which chooses not to require helmet use by persons 18 years of age or older. The full responsibility for deciding whether helmets will be required now rests with the governor and legislators of each state. It literally is a life and death question, for the motorcyclists in this state, and for motorcyclists in other states for which Wisconsin will help set a precedent.

We believe that the documentation on helmet use proves that helmets are effective in preventing or reducing the severity of head injuries. We also believe that it has been documented that helmet use laws result in relatively high levels of helmet use while voluntary programs result in substantially lower levels of helmet use.

Of course, there are other motorcycle accident countermeasures which we believe to be effective, such as improved driver licensing and improved motorcycle safety education programs. But these cannot be considered clear alternatives to helmet use, rather, they should be considered as complementary to helmet use.

Whether or not you decide to repeal your helmet law, we urge that you consider the need for more effective motorcycle operator licensing programs and provision for making safety education available to every novice motorcyclist. They will help prevent motorcycle crashes

UPDATE . . .

NHTSA: CATALYTIC CONVERTER NOT “UNREASONABLE” HAZARD: The “rate and nature of catalytic converter incidents do not present an unreasonable risk of death or injury to the public,” according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

While NHTSA “will continue to monitor reports of catalytic converter safety problems,” the agency is closing its public docket, established in August 1975, to collect information on possible safety hazards posed by the converters (see *Status Report*, Vol. 10, No. 14, Aug. 14, 1975). If “the public interest demands it,” the agency will reopen the docket, NHTSA said.

TRUCK AND BUS GOALS: The federal task force outlining goals for trucks and buses beyond 1980 in the areas of safety, fuel economy, noise and exhaust emission levels has extended the deadline for receiving public comments on its draft report. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 11, No. 15, Sept. 23, 1976.) April 29 is now the comment closing date. Copies of the draft report, as well as summaries of other comments, can be obtained from the Manager, Voluntary Truck and Bus Program, TST - 50, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C. 20590. The telephone number is (202) 426-4560.

INSURANCE DISCOUNT: The Travelers Insurance Companies have joined Allstate, Nationwide and Volkswagen Insurance in offering premium reductions of 30 percent on medical payments and personal injury protection coverages for cars with full front seat passive protection. (See *Status Report* Vol. 12, No. 2, Feb. 3, 1977.) According to a recent letter from Travelers to Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams, the insurer also plans to offer a discount for driver-only air bag systems and “other passive restraint systems” that meet federal safety standards. Travelers will determine the amount of this discount after “a detailed review of these alternative systems.”

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highway
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the highway loss reduction

Status Report

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